

ART

Old, new mingle in recent exhibits

By J. Gluckstern

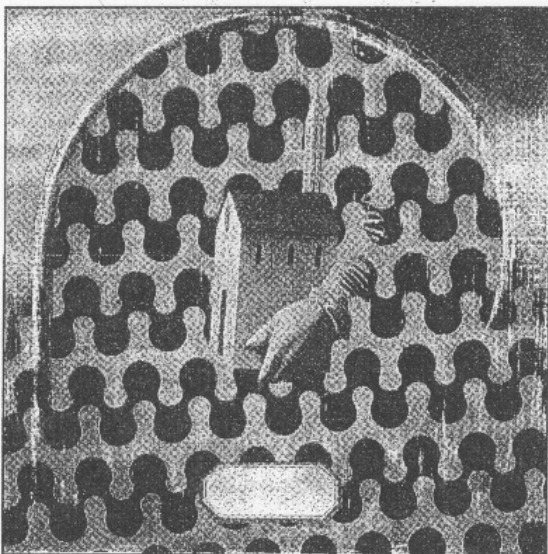
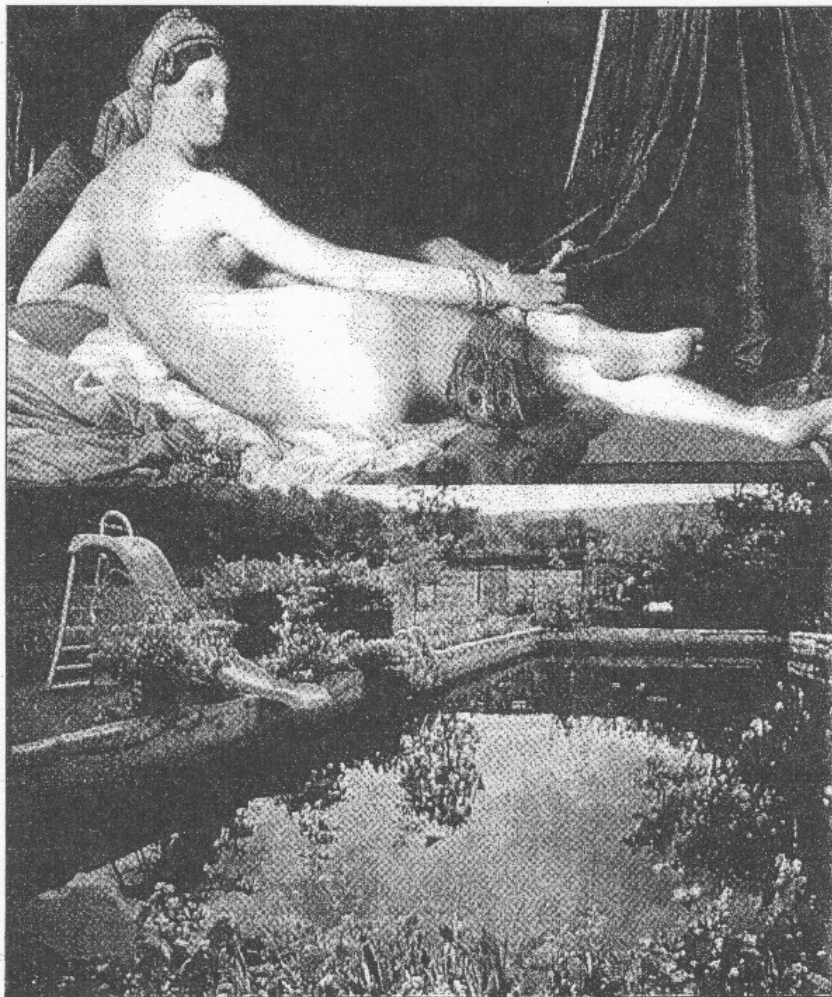
Camera Visual Arts Critic

While most artists working today have at least a passing knowledge of Renaissance art — if only, in some cases, to continue to rebel against it — few embrace its subtle beauties as elegantly as Anne Connell. But it would be a mistake to think of Connell's work as mere imitation. Or even, for that matter, imitation at all.

In her solo show currently on display at Denver's Robischon Gallery, Connell incorporates late medieval/early Renaissance imagery and technique into exquisite small-scale oils on board that seem to have the presence and aesthetic punch of much larger pieces. That's partly by design — which, incidentally, is another key element of the work — but it's also a product of her keen eye and meticulous hand.

None of this attention to craft and art history should surprise, especially considering Connell's statement that "beauty, in and of itself, has consequence." But what might be curious (and, ultimately, fascinating) for even the casual viewer is the seeming obscurity and marginality of the imagery she plucks from her classical sources — such as a small spire-like pyramid taken from Giotto di Bondone's Stefaneschi Altarpiece in the Vatican Museums that's used in Connell's "In Arcadia (2)" or a detail from a drapery in Benozzo Gozzoli's "The Mystic Marriage of Saint Catherine and Saints" (1466) in the suitably named "The Worship of Obscurity." (Most of the sources for these precise appropriations are disclosed in an available list of annotations.)

From these small details, however, Connell builds stunning compositions, often playing with scale and mixing pattern and representational image in a way that both honors their scholarly lineage and demonstrates a thoroughly contemporary brilliance. And as yet another reminder of the images' formal past, Connell also carefully layers and strips away paint to give the finished works a look of artificial age.



Above, 'Ingre, Odalisque/ Abandoned Pool, Lexington, New York,' by Ken Iwamasa. Left, 'Specimen' by Anne Connell. Both are from exhibits on display at Denver's Robischon Gallery through Jan. 3.

IF YOU GO

WHAT • "New Paintings," by Anne Connell, and "Dichotomies," featuring work by Jamie Brunson, Tom Judd, Gary Emrich, Jeanne Quinn, Christopher Pelley, Lidya Buzio and Ken Iwamasa
WHEN • Through Jan. 3; hours, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday
WHERE • Robischon Gallery, 1740 Wazee St., Denver
ADMISSION • Free
CALL • (303) 298-7788

Split infinitives

Continuing and expanding Connell's dualistic investigations of modern and classical sensibilities is "Dichotomies," a group show in the middle gallery space at Robischon featuring work by Jamie Brunson, Tom Judd, Gary Emrich, Jeanne Quinn, Christopher Pelley, Lidya Buzio and Ken Iwamasa. It's an eclectic field that splits its worlds in a variety of ways, from incremental shifts of color and material to enormous leaps of time and space.

Brunson, for instance, juxtaposes the look of a wood-burned surface with that of a patterned yellow grid in the sharply divided "Cuilapam," then points up minute differences in shade and pattern by pairing the monochromatic fields of "Marigold Study" and "Psychedelic Paisley Study." On a more representational front, Buzio renders architectural cityscapes on clay vessels so as to resemble the surfaces of fresco paintings, while Emrich adheres photo emulsion transfers of classical painting scenes (lifted from what look to be illustrated playing cards) onto the bristles of workman-like paintbrushes.

Iwamasa, though, is given the most play, with a full dozen horizontally bisected digital prints hung together to form a vertical oval installation. (Five of these were in the recent University of Colorado faculty show at the CU Art Museum, as was another Q-Tip installation by Quinn similar to the one she's created at Robischon.) Each print pairs a culturally iconic scene from classical art — such as a Rembrandt self-portrait or Leonardo Da Vinci's "Mona Lisa" — with a thematically related shot of what could be called contemporary ruins. The resulting clashes of high culture and culture gone to seed (among them the pleasantly fluid comparison of Pieter Bruegel's "Tower of Babel" and an abandoned swimming pool in Lexington, N.Y.) serve, just as Connell's best work does, as provocative reminders of the thin line between timeless creative effort and the melancholic resonances of age.